



Promoting human health through forests: Overview and major challenges

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Abstract:

This review aims to contribute to the ongoing discussion about human health, global change, and biodiversity by concentrating on the relationships between forests and human health. This review gives a short overview of the most important health benefits that forests provide to humans, and the risks that forests may pose to human health. Furthermore, it discusses the future challenges for the research on the links between forests and human health, and for delivering health through forests in practice. Forests provide enormous possibilities to improve human health conditions. The results of a vast amount of research show that forest visits promote both physical and mental health by reducing stress. Forests represent rich natural pharmacies by virtue of being enormous sources of plant and microbial material with known or potential medicinal or nutritional value. Forest food offers a safety net for the most vulnerable population groups in developing countries, and healthy forest ecosystems may also help in regulation of infectious diseases. Utilizing forests effectively in health promotion could reduce public health care budgets and create new sources of income. Main challenges to delivering health through forests are due to ecosystem and biodiversity degradation, deforestation, and climate change. In addition, major implementation of research results into practice is still lacking. Inadequate implementation is partly caused by insufficient evidence base and partly due to the lack of policy-makers' and practitioners' awareness of the potential of forests for improving human health. This calls for strong cooperation among researchers, policy-makers, and practitioners as well as between different sectors, especially between health and environmental professionals.

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Resource Description

Communication:

resource focus on research or methods on how to communicate or frame issues on climate change; surveys of attitudes, knowledge, beliefs about climate change

A focus of content

Communication Audience:

audience to whom the resource is directed

Researcher

Exposure :

Climate Change and Human Health Literature Portal

weather or climate related pathway by which climate change affects health

Ecosystem Changes

Geographic Feature:

resource focuses on specific type of geography

Other Geographical Feature

Other Geographical Feature : Forest

Geographic Location:

resource focuses on specific location

Global or Unspecified

Health Co-Benefit/Co-Harm (Adaption/Mitigation):

specification of beneficial or harmful impacts to health resulting from efforts to reduce or cope with greenhouse gases

A focus of content

Health Impact:

specification of health effect or disease related to climate change exposure

Infectious Disease, Mental Health/Stress

Infectious Disease: Vectorborne Disease

Mental Health Effect/Stress: Stress Disorder

Mitigation/Adaptation:

mitigation or adaptation strategy is a focus of resource

Adaptation

Resource Type:

format or standard characteristic of resource

Review

Timescale:

time period studied

Time Scale Unspecified